

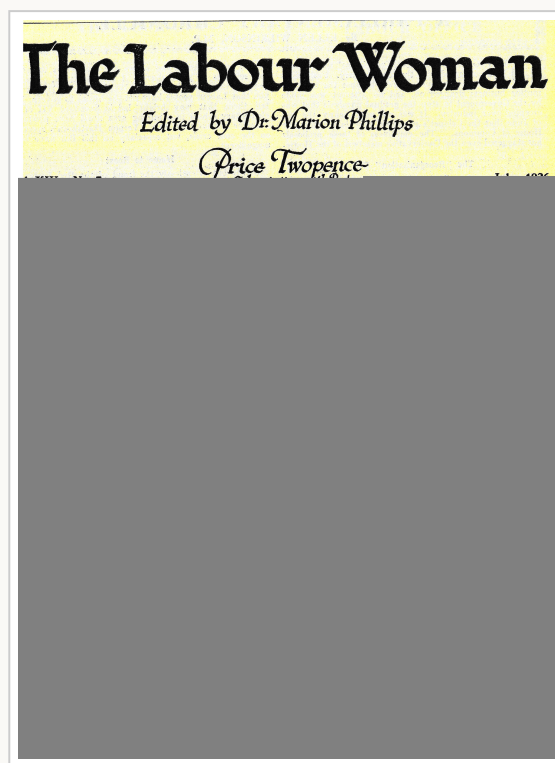
# After the General Strike

*A forgotten women's solidarity campaign: The Women's Committee for the Relief of the Miners' Wives and Children, May 1926 to January 1927*

BY MARY QUAILE CLUB | MAY 11, 2026

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In May 1926 a million miners were locked out by the coal-owners for refusing to accept cuts in pay and a longer working week. The Trades Union Congress called a General Strike in their support but, after 10 days, they called it off with no agreement with the government or coal-owners. The TUC had surrendered.



*The Labour Woman, July 1926, highlighting the struggles of mining families.*

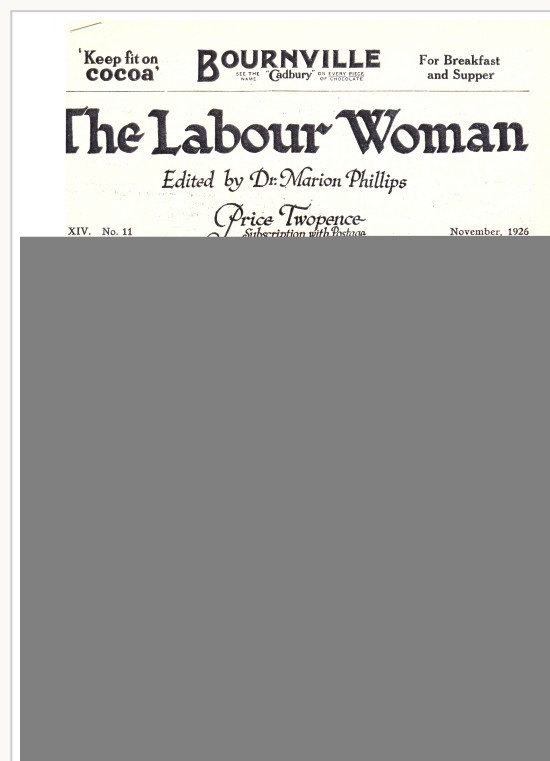
Miners and their families were now abandoned and facing months on strike with few, if any, resources. Starvation stared them in the face. On 19 May the miners' leader A J Cook asked Marion Phillips, the Labour Party's chief women's officer, if it was possible to get a committee of Labour party women together to run a Flag Day for the wives and children of the locked-out miners.

Marion and her comrades took action immediately, holding their first meeting on the following day at which they set up the Women's Committee for the Relief of Miners' Wives and Children which took over the whole work of collecting funds for relief. The chair was Ellen Wilkinson (Labour MP for Middlesbrough), the joint secretaries were Marion and Lilian Dawson, while Josephine Slessor was the treasurer. Marion wrote a book about the solidarity campaign *Women and the Miners' Lockout, The story of the Women's Committee for the Relief of the Miners' Wives and Children*, published in

The Committee sent out their first appeal on 20 May. Marion Phillips estimated that a million leaflets were distributed in the course of their fundraising work. Many Labour Party Women's Sections went door to door, collecting funds, food and other essentials. By the time the fund closed on 8 January 1927 the committee had raised £313,874, the equivalent of over £20 million today.

Over 50 miners' choirs gave concerts and glee parties outside railway stations and factory. A number of miners' wives from different parts of the country came to speak in London, two of whom worked with the choirs making an appeal to the public. Marion Phillips says that the women:

*"...undoubtedly made profound impression when they spoke of the lives of people in the coalfields from personal experiences, and appreciably increased the collections wherever they went. A magnificent Women's Meeting, when Margaret Bondfield took the chair and Sybil Thorndike was one of the speakers, was held at Kingsway Hall in June at which five miners' wives addressed the audience. This had been organised by the Women's Section of the National Union of General Workers. Miners' wives also led the procession of the London Labour women at Hyde Park in July."*



*The Labour Woman, December 1926.*

A particular focus of the Committee was supporting mothers and babies. Marion Phillips estimated that 1,200 babies a week were being born in the coalfields. The lead on offering support was taken by the Labour Party's Women's Advisory Councils: the local WAC secretaries were the lynchpin of the support as Marion Phillips recorded.

*“They threw themselves into the struggle...and in many cases the husbands of the secretaries and even the children, took a good share of the work upon their shoulders. Many of them found their houses turned into clothes stores and could never sit down to a meal without being called several times to the door, but they bore it all with wonderful patience... many of the Secretaries worked twelve hours a day for weeks on end and wore their strength out.”*

Another major initiative was to provide boots for children. After an appeal for funds and the support of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives they purchased over 34,000 pairs. They also set up a boot repairing scheme in September through local committees which repaired some 40,000 pairs.

During the London Dock strike of 1912 a scheme of child adoption had been very successfully carried out. As the Miners' Lock-out went on it was decided to introduce a similar scheme for miners' children, focusing on the Kent and Somerset mining areas which were small isolated mining communities in rural areas whose Education and Poor Law authorities were vindictive. They then moved on to other areas. In all over 2,000 children were found temporary homes.

Marion Phillips wrote:

*“The hostesses came from every class of society, from those who owned motor cars to working people living in small flats, but the children seemed to fit in very readily with all. Often when they came the ‘aunts’ were very troubled about their food. They had become so accustomed to having little, and probably in addition arrived so tired with the journey, that at first they would eat nothing but bread and jam, to the bitter disappointment of the hostess who had been looking forward seeing them enjoy their first solid meal in weeks. One child who had not only suffered a long period of poverty, but whose home had just been burned down, was in such a neurotic condition that we arranged for her to be treated at the Tavistock Clinic for Nervous Diseases and she made a very fine recovery.”*



In August a delegation was invited to tour the Soviet Union which included six miners' wives: Mrs Cook, Mrs Johnson (Northumberland), Mrs Errington (Durham), Mrs Chester (Yorkshire), Mrs Eddishaw (Nottingham), and Mrs Green (Wales). They spent six weeks touring the country and addressed many meetings.

Finally, as the leaves fell, the mining communities, many of them starving, were forced back to work on the mine-owners' terms. On 1 October *Labour Woman* summed up the struggle, finding hope even in defeat, noting the unyielding spirit of solidarity that had been forged among the women of the